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Tesseract parents make plea to diocese

By Anne Ryman
The Arizona Republic

Scottsdale parents who were outbid by the Catholic Diocese of Phoenix in their quest to buy Tesseract School are asking the diocese to withdraw its offer or allow their children to remain on the north Scottsdale campus for the 2001-02 school year.

"If we could stay on campus next year, we have time to build a school," said Betsey Kauffman, vice president of the Tesseract North Scottsdale Foundation, a non-profit group that formed in October in hopes of buying the 18-acre school site at 9701 E. Bell Road for $9.6 million. "We could hold on to our student population and provide some security for our teachers," Kauffman said.

The Tesseract parents, whom the diocese reportedly outbid by about $2 million, aren't giving up. While they are eyeing other sites in north Phoenix and north Scottsdale, they said it will be hard to leave their campus if the deal with the diocese goes through.

"There's a lot of mourning and shock going on," Kauffman said.

"The parents really felt we were going to have it. We

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were moving ahead with plans."

Diocesan officials declined comment, but are reportedly planning to build a high school. "All I'm able to say is we're in negotiations," said Marybeth Mueller, superintendent of schools.

Tesseract Group Inc. filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in October. The company, which operates private, charter and pre-kindergarten schools in Arizona, has continued to operate its schools while trying to sell its assets.

The company has agreed to sell the Paradise Valley and Ahwatukee private schools to parent groups, subject to U.S. Bankruptcy Court approval. The parent groups plan to run the schools as private, nonprofit organizations using current staff members.

The 3-year-old Scottsdale school, which has 400 students, is in a fast-growing part of the city where neighboring public schools are nearing capacity. The Scottsdale Unified School District is building an elementary/middle school, and the district plans to build another high school in north Scottsdale over the next four years.

Even if a Catholic high school begins operating, the district still will need to open the planned high school, said Shannon Bingham, a district demographic consultant. He expects a private high school would have little impact on the district's 27,346-student enrollment.

"Our projections have predicted pretty steady rates of both church and private schools in north Scottsdale through 2010," he said.

Reach the reporter at anne.ryman@arizonarepublic.com or (602) 444-6881.

Parents Ask Leeway on Tesseract School

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